

In the claims:

1. (currently amended) A method of securing packet data transferred ~~between a first and second member of a private network~~ over a backbone, the backbone operating according to a routing protocol, the method comprising the steps of:

receiving a packet from any one of a plurality of members of a private network, the packet being sent from only one member to only one other member of the private network, the packet including a private network address comprising a source address and a destination address, the packet further including a payload; and

in response to determining that [[if]] the packet must be transmitted over the backbone in order to reach the destination address:

apportioning the packet into a first portion and a second portion, wherein the first portion includes fields of the packet used for transmission of the packet according to the protocol of the backbone including the private network address and the second portion includes the payload;

appending a gateway source address associated with the source address of the packet to the second portion to generate a group header and transforming the second portion of the packet according to a group security association associated with a plurality of members of the private network to provide a transformed portion which includes a transformed group header, where at least one member of the private network with which the group security association is associated is neither sender nor recipient of the packet;

appending the first portion of the packet to the transformed portion to provide a transformed packet; and

transmitting the transformed packet to the backbone using the private network address.

2. (cancelled)

3. (cancelled)

4. (currently amended) The method of claim 1 wherein the step of transforming is performed at [[the]] a first member of the private network.

5. (cancelled)

6. (previously presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein the first portion of the packet comprises a first header having a type the group header comprises a group type and wherein the step of generating a group header includes the step of copying the type of the first header to the group type.

7. (original) The method according to step 6, wherein the first header further includes a length, the group header further includes a group length, and wherein the method includes the steps of copying the length to the group length.

8. (original) The method according to claim 1 wherein the group security association is an Internet Protocol Security transform.

9. (original) The method according to claim 8, wherein the group security association is an Encapsulated Security Protocol.

10. (original) The method according to claim 1, wherein the group security association is an Internet Key Encryption.

11. (original) The method according to claim 1, further comprising the step of receiving, at each member of the private network, a key corresponding to the private network group security association.

12. (currently amended) A method for securing a communication link between [[at least]] two members of a private network, the communication link for transporting a packet having a first

header and a payload, the first header comprising a private network address identifying a source address and a destination address packet, the method including the steps of:

distributing a group security association to each of the at least ~~[[two]]~~ three members of the private network;

transforming each packet transferred between only two of the at least three members of the private network in response to determining that ~~[[if]]~~ the packet must be transmitted over a backbone, the step of transforming including the steps of:

generating a second header, the second header including a gateway source address associated with the source address in the first header, and a destination address identifying the private network;

replacing the first header of the packet with the generated second header to provide a modified packet;

applying the group security association to the modified packet to provide a secure packet including applying the security association to the gateway source address; and

appending the first header to the secure packet to provide a transformed packet;
and

forwarding the transformed packet over the communication link using the private network address,

whereby at least one member of the private network with which the group security association is associated is neither sender nor recipient of the packet.

13. (cancelled)

14. (cancelled)

15. (original) The method of claim 12, wherein the step of transforming is performed at a gateway device disposed between one of the at least two members of the virtual private network and the communication link.

16. (withdrawn) A method of receiving a packet transmitted between a first and second member of a private network over a backbone operating according to a protocol comprising the steps of:

receiving a packet from the first member of the private network for the second member of the private network, the packet including an address of the private network;

determining, responsive to the address, whether the packet received over the backbone is a secure packet;

responsive to a determination that the packet is a secure packet, stripping a first header from the packet to provide a remainder packet, the remainder packet comprising a group header and an encapsulated payload, and applying a group security association associated with the private network to the remainder packet, the remainder packet comprising an updated group header including fields associated with the protocol of the backbone.

17. (withdrawn) The method according to claim 16, wherein the backbone comprises a plurality of provider devices, and wherein the steps of receiving, determining and stripping occur at one of the provider edge devices.

18. (withdrawn) The method according to claim 16, wherein an edge device is disposed between the backbone and the second member of the private network, and wherein the steps of receiving, determining and stripping occur at the edge device.

19. (withdrawn) The method according to claim 16, wherein the step of determining further comprises the step of analyzing bits of the packet that identify a type of the packet.

20. (withdrawn) The method according to claim 16, wherein the first header and the group header each include a type field, and wherein the step of determining determines whether the type field of the first header and the type field of the second header correspond to predetermined values.

21. (withdrawn) The method according to claim 16, further comprising the step of copying a type field from the updated group header into a type field of the first header, stripping the updated

group header from the payload, and appending the first header to the payload to provide a restored packet for forwarding.

22. (withdrawn) The method-according to claim 16 further comprising the step of determining whether the group security association can be processed at the receiver.

23. (currently amended) An apparatus at a node for transforming packets for forwarding between only two members of a plurality of members of a group that includes more than two members communicating on a scalable private network over a backbone, each of the plurality of group members communicating with the backbone via respective gateways, wherein the backbone operates according to a protocol, the apparatus comprising:

physical memory circuitry including a key table, the key table including a security association for each group for which the node is a member;

a microprocessor that executes transform logic comprising means for modifying packets received from only one [[a]] source member of the group for transfer to only one destination member of the group on a private network over the backbone by:

extracting a private network address header from a received packet, the private network address header including a source and destination address;

appending, to the received packet, a group header including a group identifier associated with the private network and a gateway address associated with a source member;

the received packet including the group header to provide a modified packet

appending the private network address header to the modified packet to provide a transformed packet, where only information in the transformed packet that enables communication over the backbone is unsecured; and

forwarding logic for forwarding communication between members of the group using a private network address associated with the group,

whereby at least one member of the private network with which the group security association is associated is neither sender nor recipient of the packet.

24. (cancelled)

25. (cancelled)

26. (original) The apparatus of claim 23, wherein the node is one of the plurality of members of the scalable private network.

27. (withdrawn) An apparatus at a node for restoring transformed packets forwarded between a plurality of members of a scalable private network over a backbone, wherein the backbone operates according to a protocol, the apparatus comprising:

- a control path including:

- means for determining whether the packet is a transformed packet;

- a key table, the key table including a security association for each private network that the node is a member;

- restore logic operable to apply a security association to only a portion of each transformed packet, responsive to the means for determining indicating that the packet is a transformed packet.

28. (withdrawn) The apparatus of claim 27 further comprising a forwarding path, wherein packets are always forwarded first to the control path to determine whether the packet is a transformed packet.

29. (withdrawn) The apparatus of claim 27 wherein the backbone comprises a plurality of provider devices, and wherein the node is one of the plurality of provider devices in the backbone.

30. (withdrawn) The apparatus of claim 27 wherein the node is an edge device disposed between the backbone and a receiving member of the scalable private network.